

# Northern Edge:

## Practicing War at the Top of the World

By Sgt. 1st Class David Abrams, USA

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As the mercury hovered  
around (and sometimes  
dropped below)  
zero degrees Fahrenheit,  
Exercise NORTHERN EDGE,  
Alaskan Command's  
largest annual joint  
training exercise,  
staged realistic scenarios  
at half-a-dozen locations  
around the state of Alaska,  
19-30 March 2001.

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A Canadian Harbor Defense Officer from Maritime Operations Group 5 briefs Canadian Port Security Unit functions to a visiting U.S. senior officer during the port security portion of NORTHERN EDGE.

COURTESY OF CANADIAN DEPARTMENT OF  
NATIONAL DEFENCE, MARITIME FORCES PACIFIC

PHOTO BY SSGT. VINCE PARKER, USAF



PHOTO BY SSGT. COHEN YOUNG, USAF



**An Alaska National Guard scout, Pvt. Gabriel Duckworth, mans a defense position during NORTHERN EDGE.**

PHOTO BY PH1 (SW/NAC) SPIKE CALL, USN



**A U.S. Army air defense artillery crew fires a Stinger missile during NORTHERN EDGE.**



During the month of March, Alaska turns into a beehive of military activity due to NORTHERN EDGE, which began in 1975 as Operation JACK FROST. This year's exercise involved roughly 10,000 U.S. soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen and Coast Guardsmen. About 160 Canadian Regular Force and Reserve sailors, plus soldiers from Land Forces Western Area, augmented the U.S. participants for harbor defense and maritime operations exercises.

NORTHERN EDGE incorporates theater missile defense, force protection, air-to-air fighter aircraft engagements, joint live-fire exercises, airborne jumps and air assaults, and combat search-and-rescue operations. Major air and ground maneuvers took place in the interior of the

state at Eielson Air Force Base and in training areas southeast of Fairbanks, with supporting missions also launching from Elmendorf Air Force Base at Anchorage. An estimated 850 aircraft missions – also known as sorties – were flown during the two weeks of the exercise.

“Scale, intensity and focus,” is how Lt. Gen. Norty Schwartz, Commander, Alaskan Command, described his command's premiere training event. “There's an intensity, a dedicated flavor only an exercise like NORTHERN EDGE can provide,” he said. “From the joint atmosphere and the live fire to the air support and direct support to soldiers in the field, this is a unique opportunity to showcase what America's military is really about – one team working together to protect America's interests at home and abroad any time, anywhere, under any conditions.”

Many of the 160 Canadian Navy personnel spent their two weeks aboard the USS *Ogden*, a San Diego-based, Austin-class amphibious transport dock. PSU 4, a Canadian reserve unit consisting of 97 seamen, trained hand-in-hand with U.S. Navy and Coast Guard personnel in port security during the exercise.

PHOTO BY PH1  
(SW/NAO) SPIKE CALL, USN

A U.S. Army artilleryman PFC Sokhoeun Bo (originally from Cambodia), checks his ground stakes for an M119A2 Howitzer during NORTHERN EDGE.





**A member of the U.S. Air Force 354th Security Forces Squadron, A1C Marvin Skinner, guards an A-10 Thunderbolt II at Eielson Air Force Base during NORTHERN EDGE.**

One of the drivers of the PSU's inflatable boats, Canadian Leading Seaman Rob Boots, said, "I've become a more efficient leader and boat driver. In the course of my career, I've gone on various exercises and missions developing my boat tactics and skills. NORTHERN EDGE is one of those exercises that has really helped me reach my full potential."

Earlier, as the Canadians arrived in Ketchikan on C-130 Hercules aircraft, Leading Seaman Mike Comrie

of the Canadian Navy said he was geared up for the training. "It's not everyday you get the chance to travel to Alaska and be part of a training exercise as large as this ... Let's hit the sea and let the training begin." Less than a week later he got his wish, as PSU 4 boats skimmed across the waves in Ketchikan's port to intercept an "enemy" vessel.

"Port security is our 'number one' mission," said Leading Seaman Boots. "In a port, such as Somalia, it's very important to get humanitarian assistance to where it's supposed to be. As port security, we have to ensure it gets to its location."

PHOTO BY SR. AMN. CRAIG CLAPPER, USAF

**A U.S. Air Force  
Combat Controller  
prepares to land on  
the drop zone during  
NORTHERN EDGE  
air operations.**

PHOTO BY TSgt. VALERIE WEAVER, USAF



PHOTO BY SR. AMN. CRAIG CLAPPER, USAF

**U.S. Air Force Combat  
Controllers from the 22nd  
Special Tactics Squadron  
perform a HALO  
(High Altitude-Low Open)  
jump from a C-130 during  
NORTHERN EDGE.**



PHOTO BY TS/SGT. BRIAN SNYDER, USAF



**U.S. Marines from the 4th Reconnaissance Battalion use hand signals to communicate in the cold water of Ketchikan, Alaska, during NORTHERN EDGE.**

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**Canadian Port Security Unit 4 provided boats and skilled personnel for NORTHERN EDGE harbor security operations. A Canadian Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) escorts the U.S. Coast Guard vessel *Naushon* at Ketchikan, Alaska.**

PHOTO BY SSGT. COHEN YOUNG, USAF







Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats of Port Security Unit 4, a Canadian naval reserve unit, patrolled the waters of Ketchikan, Alaska, to intercept "enemy" vessels.



U.S. sailors from SEAL Team 5 and Special Boat Unit Detachment 22 carry out beach insertions during NORTHERN EDGE.

Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class McLennan said, "During the exercise, we've been able to train our people on how to work in an integrated unit with the Americans." He continued, "If we're going to fight together, then we must train together."

It's that kind of precise cooperation that prepares the military for actual combat operations, said Lt. Gen. Schwartz. "There may well be occasions when we can just 'kick the door down.' But as each situation develops, it requires joint force not single-service solutions to operational requirements. Each component has to be ready to do its part."

The Alaskan Command also uses this opportunity to showcase U.S. military interoperability to visiting foreign officials, who get a first-hand look at the tough, Arctic training. Representatives from the armed forces of Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea observed the exercise.

Precision teamwork between different branches of the services was on display everywhere – on the ground, in the sky, and at sea. Officers from the Korean Navy and the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force visited the action taking place in the choppy, gray waters near Ketchikan, Alaska, as U.S. and Canadian maritime forces worked together in a harbor defense scenario. The officers toured facilities, received briefings, and watched as boats – some flying American and others flying Canadian flags – circled the harbor.

"We are delighted to host these foreign military representatives as they view our training and observe our capabilities to respond to various operations in which we may team with their countries' forces," said Maj. Gen. James Lovelace, USA, Commander, U.S. Army Alaska, and Alaska Command's deputy commander.

More than 400 miles north of the Canadian and U.S. forces patrolling the Ketchikan waters, Australian Flying Officer (F/O) Bruce Wilde was doing his part with his new American acquaintances. F/O Wilde, whose rank is equivalent to a U.S. first lieutenant, spent most of his time with the 3rd Air



PHOTO BY SSGT. COHEN YOUNG, USAF



A U.S. Marine  
"enemy aggressor"  
captures a Canadian Port  
Security Unit 4 member  
during NORTHERN EDGE.

PHOTO BY LT. TIMOTHY BOEHLKE, USN



One of the exercise observers, Capt. An Soo-Ho of the Republic of Korea Navy, is escorted aboard the USS *Ogden* (LPD 5), a U.S. Navy amphibious transport dock employed during NORTHERN EDGE.





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**A Canadian Port Inspection Diver from Fleet Diving Unit Pacific signals the completion a successful dive and inspection during NORTHERN EDGE.**

Support Operations Squadron at Fort Wainwright. The Royal Australian Air Force reserve operations officer flew on an EC-130, observed air strikes, and peered over the shoulders of staff officers at the Tactical Operations Center at Fort Greely.

“It was great to see how the United States can tie all the different military services together,” he said. “We don’t often get to play in a joint exercise

environment. We normally jump from brigade-level exercises to combined forces exercises, such as TANDEM THRUST. So it is good to see, from my perspective, what happens at this level of the game.” He continued, “The theory is that we can come and integrate with you guys ... So to come over and watch U.S. units in action enables me to determine how well we will be able to integrate.”

Like the Canadian service members in Ketchikan, the Australian officer said the meshing teamwork of NORTHERN EDGE left an indelible impression. There was little doubt in his mind that the exercise proved one thing – “We will work well together.” □